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Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for your time and attention this evening.

The great news in the Governor's proposed budget is the \$30million for the development of 150 new units of permanent supportive housing, along with funding for the attached services and subsidies. We are deeply grateful to the Governor for including this funding, as well as \$50 million for affordable housing. Not only will this provide critical resources for people who are homeless, but will also provide new jobs in a construction sector that has an unemployment rate of close to 25%.

At Columbus House, we are seeing a steady number of people who are homeless, with a census some nights as high as 110 in our winter overflow shelter and 80 or more at our year-round program where we have to set up cots to accommodate the alarming number of women seeking shelter. For the past two years, we have asked area congregations to house 12 men in their social halls during the coldest winter months to help accommodate the increase in demand. At the same time, Columbus House has been very successful in creating a stock of permanent supportive housing. Today, we provide case management services to over 100 people who identified as chronically homeless, who now live in the community live in either congregate or scattered site units.

Permanent supportive housing is meant to provide housing for chronically homeless adults, people who have had multiple or lengthy episodes of homelessness and who live with mental illness and /or substance abuse. This represents about 30% of the population of people who are homeless.

Homelessness is an issue of poverty, first and foremost. The cost of living in this state is well beyond those who are employed only at minimum wage. For them, the lack of affordable housing leads them into homelessness and into our shelters. Without some assistance, they will be stuck there, as we know from our experience with clients at Columbus House. To avoid this dangerous situation, we are asking for an additional 100 rental assistance vouchers. We know from our work with HPRP, the sooner you get people out of the shelter with some assistance, the less likely they will be to get trapped in a long cycle of homelessness. These new vouchers will provide much needed assistance to get people back into the community where they can lead full and productive lives.

We would further ask that you assure that the Security Deposit Guarantee Program is re-opened. I can tell you that one of the common issues I hear from people in the shelter is that they do not have the funds for a security deposit. We know from our work in the HPRP program that an overwhelming number of calls for financial assistance has come from those who need help with a security deposit. HPRP funds in many areas of the state are already spent, leaving no resources to rely on. Restoring the Security Deposit Guarantee Program will be a tremendous benefit for people living in poverty and people who are homeless

Finally, we're asking that you reject HB 6380 which would cut a DCF pilot program for homeless and runaway youth. Across the state, and across the country, we're seeing an increase in the number of 18 to 24 year old homeless youth. They are aging out of the foster care system without a safety net to help them on to next steps in their new lives as young adults. Some of them are already parents themselves; some are identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and have experienced rejection by family and friends. Many have experienced violence, and some are already involved in the criminal justice system. My own worst fear is that this is the next generation of chronically homeless adults, and if we do not address them now, we will only find ourselves working with these same people as homeless adults ten years down the road. We owe it to them to provide the services and housing now that will help stop their cycle of homelessness.

I want to thank you again for your time this afternoon, and for the support that you have given in the past toward ending the crisis of homelessness.

Respectfully submitted by Alison Cunningham, Executive Director, Columbus House, Inc.